

## EAL Frequently Asked Questions and their Answers

1. Is learning English the most important idea for us to focus on?

**Be aware that although we, as educators, start by thinking about EAL teaching strategies, learning English may not be on the top of the students', or their parents', list. PTSD, sorting through and grieving loss of homeland, family, life-as-it-was, starting over ... there might be a very long list of things that are more important to the student in your class than learning English, math, social studies or anything else. Understanding who the student is, and what their needs are, is an important part of a student intake meeting.**

2. What does checking the ESL box on the report mean?

Usually the ESL box gets checked if the student has arrived and been assessed as a stage 1 (for certain) or 2 (depending on how low/early a stage 2) EAL student. This means that they need every adaptation possible to allow for instruction/learning to take place. It means that the primary focus, including in your class, is to learn English. It also means that assessment for whatever your usual class is, does not apply to this student and you will need to devise a different way of thinking about assessment, how it is used, and then how it is reported.

3. What does an "e" credit mean?

- a. When a student is signed up for an "e" credit course (a uniquely high school issue), it means that the course is the medium through which the student is to learn, or improve, their level of English. It implies that their English is still the primary focus of all their learning as they have arrived within the past few years and are still receiving funding as EAL eligible students.
- b. **IMPORTANT:** an "e" credit at a grade 12 level means the student is not eligible to attend post secondary education until they can enter as a mature student. **IF AT ALL POSSIBLE,** make sure that by the time the student is in grade 12 there are only adaptations made, as necessary, so that the student can earn regular credits toward graduation.

4. How do we assess a non-English speaker in our class?

You are looking for improvements in English - communication, comprehension and critical thinking. Is the student making progress in their understanding of your instructions? Is the student making progress in their ability to communicate with you and others, either with the use of a device, images, gestures or verbally?

- i. Conversations.
- ii. Re-administering the Dept. of Education EAL stages assessment tool.
- iii. Visual products that appropriately represent ideas discussed in class.
- iv. Observations of the students' interactions with course materials, other students and staff members.

5. It appears like the EAL students are exhausted. What can I do about that?

Learning a new language is exhausting. Build in rest times for your students. A rest time is not requiring them to pay attention to the lesson the rest of the class is working on. Find alternative activities for them for a few minutes in each class.

- i. Youtube.com has English songs with lyrics so a student can chill while listening to and reading English
- ii. Youtube.com has shows/commercials/sports ... with Closed Captions so a student can chill while listening to and reading English
- iii. If your school has a streaming account, you can use that. YouTube makes many movies available for rent. Find a movie, use audio in either English or Ukrainian or Russian with English subtitles
- iv. Newsela.com has articles in multiple lexile levels. Have a student use the Read-Aloud option to hear the English while the words are highlighted for them to follow along.
- v. Allow student to use their iPad for games. Educational sites include SumDog, Hoodoo Math, Duolingo ... or let them simply spend time exploring something on their iPad to take a mental break during their exhausting English immersion day.
- vi. Use a rotation of these activities to create "rest" times for the EAL students who need an occasional break.

6. Is it fair for me to focus on EAL teaching strategies when I have so many other students with so many needs in my class?

Any instructional strategy that is good for an EAL student, is good for all other students too. Teachers with EAL students tend to be more concise in their instructions, are more apt to demonstrate, post more images, find more instructional media to use ...

7. What activities can activate thinking, language and content?

- a. Scaffolding activities are among the most important for all learners. Find ways to introduce ideas that connect to previous learning and existing knowledge. No matter how far out the connection is, anything that connects will help students grasp new ideas.
- b. Youtube videos: either music or other videos that connect to your key concept. Look for songs, commercials, short videos, long videos ... that related to your topic. For songs, see if you can find that song with its lyrics displayed, (where/whenever) if possible, select the Closed Captions option to display subtitles for the piece. Multimodal (visual and auditory) makes learning more accessible.
- c. Graphics, images, pictures, posters, photos, slide decks
  - i. Whatever your topic/theme is, prepare a series of pictures or images that illustrate those ideas.

- ii. Create graphic organizers to show word-webs with concepts and related vocabulary
  - iii. Have students add sticky-tabs with words and sentences describing the picture, explaining the ideas in the images
  
- 8. What experiential activity can replace the worksheet? Is there a way that learning activities can replace worksheets?
  - a. Role-plays, simulations
  - b. Games - existing games or games you create for/with your students
  - c. Question & Answer sessions
    - i. Assign roles for the interviewer and interviewee
    - ii. Bring in guests to be interviewed about the topic
  - d. Creating graphic organizers. Any kind of graphic organizer can replace worksheets (and be a more effective learning tool):
    - i. word or concept webs, idea maps, timelines, photo/image-essays ...
    - ii. <https://www.splashlearn.com/blog/what-is-a-graphic-organizer-and-its-different-types/>
    - iii. <https://visme.co/blog/graphic-organizer/>
  - e. Graphic organizers can be done in so many ways too:
    - i. Teacher models making one
    - ii. Teacher and student/s collaborate in making one
    - iii. Students collaborate in making one
  
- 9. What components are essential in an effective EAL lesson plan?
  - a. Time. All language learning requires a lot more time than activities for people who already know the language.
  - b. Repetition is the mother of learning. Cycle and recycle through ideas and activities so that comfort levels can be established.
  - c. Authentic language experiences rather than piece-meal. No lists of words please! Teach sentences, paragraphs, conversations ...
  - d. Use many visuals, find ways of incorporating seeing, hearing, touching ... into as many phases of the lesson as possible.
  
- 10. What strategies do you implement to help support English language learners?
  - a. Build in rest time as immersion is exhausting. Allow a student to focus for 20-25 minutes, then have down time for 5-10-15 minutes.
  - b. Down time doesn't need to mean "not learning" time. Find alternative activities (youtube videos, movies, newsela.com ...) to fill their "rest" times.
  - c. Partner with English speakers to play games, work on assignments, participate in activities.
  - d. Use as much of their language-of-origin as possible to help them access the target language. Thank goodness for google and other translation devices for when you don't speak their language of origin.

- e. If/when using pull-outs, include a native speaker so that the student is not in isolation and hears an additional voice speaking, modeling and supporting the learning activity.
  - f. Have I suggested visuals? Visuals, VISUALS and more visuals!
11. How would you modify curriculum, lessons, activities and assessments to make these accessible for EAL students?
- a. Modify vocabulary levels when/where possible. (See if you can find a relevant article in newsela.com and select the lowest Lexile level. If you can find other information sources that allow for lexile level adjustments, use them all.)
  - b. Allow more time than for English speakers.
  - c. Cover a fraction of the materials you would normally/otherwise cover.
12. How do we assess EAL students in our classes?
- a. When a student is identified/designated as an ESL student, you are ALWAYS assessing their English language progress, not your subject area mastery.
  - b. Is the student able to communicate? With the aid of a device? On their own?
  - c. Is the student able to comprehend? With the aid of a device? On their own?
  - d. Is the student showing progress in their ability to communicate and comprehend?
  - e. Use multiple means of assessing them - oral, visual, written, spoken ...
13. What additional supports, beyond EAL instructional strategies, are available for our refugees or immigrants?
- a. Student services has psychologists, speech and language specialists, behavioral specialists, a reading clinician, a math support teacher, and an EAL support teacher. Determine which, if any, are relevant to help you address your students' needs.
  - b. Eastman Immigration Services has a Settlement Worker In School who is available to provide a wide range of services. See their website: <https://eastmanimmigrantservices.com/services/>
  - c. Chris Goertzen co-chairs a Ukrainian Task Force helping with Ukrainian family settlement in Steinbach and surrounding area. This committee takes donations of all household items and clothing so that they can fully set-up families with a place to live when they arrive. Donations are collected at the Southland Church in Steinbach. (Over 300 families have arrived in our area alone within the 2022-2023 year.)
  - d. Southeast Helping Hands makes food available for families in need.
  - e. Soup's On is a food kitchen serving meals to families in need on Tuesdays and Fridays.
  - f. Steinbach Mennonite Brethren Church is hosting the Slavic Ukrainian Church in their building. Walter Fast is the pastor of the MB church and Nikolai Usach is the pastor of the Slavic Ukrainian Church.
14. Who can access which supports?

- a. Administrators and teachers can contact Student Services to request help with any of the clinicians and support staff that work there.
  - b. Administrators and teachers are welcome to contact Rene Schulz, the Eastman Immigration SWIS worker to inquire into the supports that he can offer you with your students or their families.
  - c. Administrators and teachers may contact, or refer any families to Southeast Helping Hands, Soup's On, the settlement task force headed by Chris Goertzen, or churches (if relevant) for any of the support services they offer.
15. This is a lot (more) on my teaching plate. Where/how does self-care fit into all of this?
- a. Take responsibility only for yourself, for the kind of teacher you are. You can create the best array of learning opportunities for your students, which many of your students will take. Allow yourself to not have your instruction reach all students with the same effects.
  - b. Be kind to yourself. You have differentiated your instruction for the range of students in your classes as long as you have been teaching. This is just another layer to complicate your teaching. So allow yourself to not be all things to all students. Be true to yourself, be the best you can be, and you will be what your students need.